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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the "District Level Indicators Supporting Quality Schools" and gives suggestions on the use of the instrument. The indicators were developed from research on effective schools and focus on activities and policies supporting quality schools. The instrument is a series of statements of goals, practices, policies, and procedures that help create or support quality schools and is divided into 10 categories. It is intended for use as a district self-study assessment tool. The assessment process can become more meaningful if the school and community take responsibility for the school improvement process itself and the assessment is considered an ongoing process. The object of the instrument is to identify priority areas for improvement or study. The paper includes recommendations for use of the instrument, including: forming a school improvement committee, deciding on a strategy for use of the instrument, orienting the staff, tabulating the results, reaching a consensus rating, displaying the results, and setting up and implementing improvement plans. An extensive bibliography is included. (MD)

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DISTRICT LEVEL INDICATORS SUPPORTING QUALITY SCHOOLS

I. OVERVIEW

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT & LEADERSHIP SERVICES
UNIT
June, 1983

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The material herein presented has been developed by the Colorado Department of Education based on three inputs:

I. "Indicators of Quality Schools," an instrument and supporting materials developed during 1981-82 by the School Improvement & Leadership Services Unit.

II. Research on school district administration, organizational development and leadership.

III. Effective practices as identified by the Review Panel, consisting of 33 Colorado local district and building administrators, teachers, evaluators, and regional and national agency educators and staff of the School Improvement and Leadership Services Unit.

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Readers with suggestions for improving these indicators, effective ways to use them or with data or experience to share are urged to contact the CDE School Improvement Unit, 866-2111.

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I. OVERVIEW

A. Purposes of the Indicators

The "District Level Indicators Supporting Quality Schools" were developed to assist school districts in their accountability-improvement process. The indicators are a guide based on current research and professional judgment as to what practices and policies at the school district level best support the development of quality schools.

The indicators are seen as having two basic purposes: 1. To be used for a district self-study. 2. To promote dialogue among and growth of persons concerned with school quality.

The focus of these indicators and those in the "Indicators of Quality Schools" is on improvement within a school or district, not on comparing schools or districts.

B. Development of These Indicators

Over several years the Colorado Department of Education has developed a set of school-level indicators of quality. The indicators were in large measure based on the effective schools research. Following the refinement of the current version of the "Indicators of Quality Schools" in May, 1982, attention was turned to looking at what school districts could do to support quality schools.

A small grant was received from the National Study of School Evaluation to develop district-level indicators. The indicators, are based as much as possible on research. They focus on those activities and policies that support quality schools.

A major factor in developing these indicators was a Review Panel of educators from throughout Colorado including district and school administrators, teachers, evaluators, persons from higher education and regional and national education agency representatives. (See appendix A)

The current version of the "District-Level Indicators Supporting Quality Schools" is a draft, not a finished product. It is available for trial and reaction.

C. Description of the Instrument

The instrument is a series of statements of goals, practices, policies and procedures that help create or support quality schools. Many of the items ask for perceptions of the respondent. The statistical validity of the instrument has not been established. However, when used as a starting place, as a way to begin a dialogue on effective practices, then the difficulty of answering a given item becomes not so critical.

"THE DISTRICT LEVEL INDICATORS SUPPORTING QUALITY SCHOOLS" instrument is divided into categories (Figure 1). Each category consists of a series of items based as much as possible on educational research on effective school district practices. Many of the items have listed below them a number of sub-items which help delineate the item under consideration.

As mentioned above, this instrument is not intended as encompassing all known categories or items supporting school quality. An assessment of a school district based on these indicators will, however, point up significant district strengths and further pinpoint areas where efforts at improvement could lead to strengthening school quality.

Figure 1

OUTLINE OF CATEGORIES	No. Items	No. Sub-items
1. Philosophy, Goals and School Improvement	10	8
2. Planning Process	5	21
3. Leadership	6	29
4. Personnel Selection, Assignment and Evaluation	11	29
5. Staff Development	4	21
6. Curriculum	3	15
7. Instruction	6	21
8. Evaluation	5	11
9. School-Community Relations	15	1
10. Implementing Educational Change	6	42
Totals	71	198

D. Use of the Indicators

An important variable in developing quality is the effective functioning at school and district levels of the accreditation-accountability process.

Major elements of this process are:

- .Effective involvement of parents and community in education;
- .A communications network responsive to the concerns and interests of the school's several publics;
- .Ongoing assessment of student needs;
- .Priority-setting and action-planning to meet identified needs;
- .Managing and evaluating the improvement effort.

The purpose of this document is to suggest one way of establishing a quality assessment process -- one way to start. School district administrators and instructional staff undoubtedly are already doing much to assure a quality educational program. It is important, however, that school and community together commit themselves to the ongoing task of assessing educational programs, following up with improvement activities, and making visible the results. A district should not attempt to use all 10 categories at once; rather it is important to establish priorities, develop a plan of action and move ahead in a systematic fashion.

How should the instrument be used?

It is to be used as a self-study. Each category may be used independently. Numbered items may be used from several categories. Sub-items, identified by letter, may be used to gather more detailed information. The assessment is an opportunity for the district to start a self-study or design an instrument for a self-study based on it's own needs. It is an evaluative tool to determine directions to be selected by the district.

How should the instrument <u>not</u> be used?

The instrument is not designed to be an assessment applied by an outside agency. It is not designed to be a measure of quality across districts. This assessment is not meant to be legislated or mandated by any agency, nor to have any tie to funding. It is a tool for the district's use and/or direction.

E. Following Through on the Assessment Process

In considering ways to make the assessment process more meaningful, it is important to establish school-community ownership both for the indicators of educational quality and for the school improvement process itself. Assessment procedures should be regarded as part of an ongoing process rather than as an infrequent occurrence.

District support for school quality does not simply happen; it is the result of thoughtful planning. Those involved in decisions that are reached must also take ownership for the products resulting from those decisions. Quality student outcomes along with quality leadership and instruction are significant products that can come from the use of a well-defined accountability/accreditation/planning process.

The following activities may be useful in carrying out the improvement process once the assessment is completed and appropriate information collected and analyzed.

- IDENTIFY district level priorities for supporting school quality. The remaining priorities may be dealt with at a future time.

- ORGANIZE and support staff task forces to develop an ACTION PLAN to achieve each priority. Allow staff members to determine whether they wish to work on a task force and if so which priority (or priorities) they wish to work toward. Students and community persons should be involved on these task forces as appropriate.

- REPORT back to the school district and community what the priorities are, the plan for improvement, and progress in carrying out improvement activities.

Further information or assistance is available from Dr. James Hennes (866-3383) or Dr. Tom Knauer (866-5355) at:

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II. USING THE QUALITY INDICATORS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A. Introduction

The District Level Indicators Supporting Quality Schools instrument is designed to be used in a district self-study, such as those leading to accreditation. The primary object is to identify priority areas for improvement or for closer study.

The research on district level effectiveness is much less definitive than research on school effectiveness. The review panel acknowledged this limitation but felt the instrument to be an excellent starting place for a self-assessment for school district improvement.

Some repetition of items may be noted. This repetition occurs because some activities will, if working well, have an impact on more than one quality area.

The purpose of the quality assessment is to provide the staff and others with a profile of the school district. From this profile the staff can identify some practices or conditions that are strong, that are comparatively weak, and where there is agreement that improvement efforts would have the most pay-off for school effectiveness. Activities, programs, and projects can then be designed to strengthen those practices seen as being potentially the most influential in improving the school's effectiveness.

Respondents to the indicators may be staff members, board members, or parents/citizens who are well-acquainted with the district's programs and activities. It would not, however, be appropriate to ask people who have little acquaintance with the district to complete the forms.

The District Level Indicators Supporting Quality Schools consist of 71 items and 198 sub-items each of which are responded to on two "What Is?" - "What Impact Potential?" scales. This takes at least an hour. In some cases you may want to select certain areas for assessment, or you may want to omit sub-item responses on the impact potential scale.

B. One Recommended Use for the Instrument

1. Form a steering committee or school improvement committee or designate part of your existing district management team as such.

2. The instrument may be used in a number of ways. The steering committee should decide on a recommended strategy.

   a) Normally each staff member will fill out the forms.

   b) In administering this instrument you may wish to organize your staff and others into small groups of three persons per group. Each member of each triad would then be asked to complete an individual assessment form. The triad leader would, however, encourage discussion and information-sharing regarding the items as the group proceeds through the instrument together.

c) Small groups of three or four may fill out the forms collectively instead of individually.

d) You may want to have community leaders and parents also fill out the form.

e) The steering committee may elect to use only certain sections for the survey or to split the questionnaire in half and have each person do only half.

3. Orient the staff. Be sure the staff is interested in looking at their district practices.

4. The steering committee tabulates the results by item and by category (area) showing both frequency and mean (average) response. Have any comments typed out for review.

5. Items or categories showing little consensus and great diversity in response are discussed at a staff meeting. A consensus rating is reached. The sub-item ratings can help pinpoint differences in understanding.

6. Display the results for each category or area. Through a group discussion of the staff, and perhaps citizens and parenta, agree on which one to three areas to focus on for improvement.

7. Set up mechanisms to develop plans for improvement. Individuals may be assigned priorities in some cases. More often, one or more task forces should be developed to work out ideas and action plans for improving the school in each priority area. You may want to do a further in-depth study of priority areas, or you may want to collect some base-line data for future use. These task forces should have volunteers from staff and, where appropriate, students, parents, and citizens.

8. Implement the improvement activities and report on plans and progress to all staff and advisory groups.

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Appendix A

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Richard Turner, Dean of Education, University of Colorado, Boulder
Hubert Wolfe, Department of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins
Emma Lou Wilson, Asst. to Superintendent, Littleton School District
Carole Wright, Vice-President, Colorado Education Association, Denver